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CAPONS AND CAPONIZING

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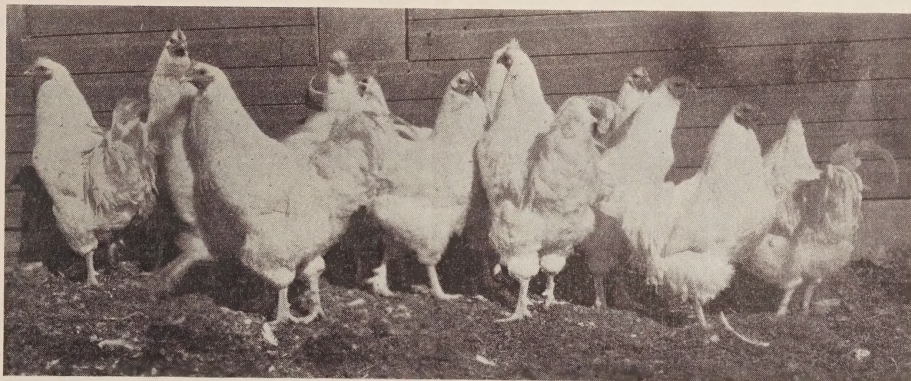
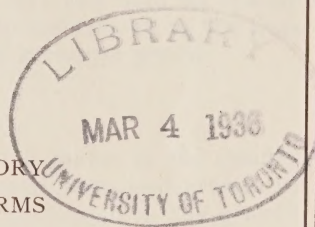
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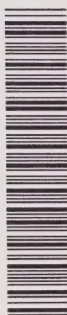
DIVISION OF POULTRY HUSBANDRY
DOMINION EXPERIMENTAL FARMS



White Orpington Capons

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CAPONS AND CAPONIZING

A capon is an unsexed or castrated male chicken. It differs from the normal, intact male in several respects. The plumage of the capon, while essentially male in colour and structure, becomes much more profuse. The hackle, saddle, tail coverts and sickles are generally longer. The comb and wattles on the capon either diminish in size, or cease to develop, and lose their bright red colour. The spurs develop as in the normal male, but this may be readily prevented by tipping the rudimentary spurs with a sharp instrument, at the time of the operation, and touching the exposed surface with a caustic pencil.

Why Caponize?

The justification for caponizing is the improvement it makes in the quality of the flesh, and not, as is so frequently stated, the greatly increased growth of the bird. As a matter of fact there is no appreciable difference in the growth of capons and cockerels up to about six months of age, after which the capon continues to grow and lay on flesh of a superior quality. Capons are more docile and less active than normal males, which possibly accounts for greater deposits of fat dispersing throughout the muscles, producing a superior quality



FIG. 1.—Cockerels ready for caponizing.

of meat. Another advantage gained by caponizing is that as the flesh of the capon does not get hard and tough, like that of the normal male, it is possible, where the price justifies it, to carry capons late in the season, thus extending the marketing period for fresh-killed roasters.

It is generally conceded that capons after the age of five or six months will produce more edible flesh per unit of feed than will the normal male.

Best Breeds, and Age at Which to Caponize

Any breed of fowl may be caponized, but on account of the commercial demand for large capons, as well as the fact that the capon becomes superior to the cockerel only after the greater part of the growth period is completed, it is generally advisable to use the large or general purpose breeds. The Light Brahmas and more recently the Jersey Giants, among the heavy breeds, and the Plymouth Rocks and Orpingtons, among the general purpose breeds, are especially favoured. Under certain circumstances, however, and for specialized markets, the light-weight breeds, such as Leghorns, make excellent capons.

The best age at which to caponize is from two to three months, when the testes are still small and comparatively inactive. The appearance of the comb and wattles is the best indication of the condition of the testes. The operation should be performed before these appendages become enlarged and turgid.

Instruments and Equipment Necessary

The necessary instruments are simple and inexpensive. There are many sets on the market, any of which will serve the purpose. Different operators become used to, and consequently prefer, different types of instruments. A knife, a spreader, a hook, a probe and a remover make up the typical set. These instruments differ slightly in form and structure, especially the remover, the most recent type of which, a specially designed instrument which locks on the testes, has become popular.

In addition to these instruments, the necessary equipment consists of a table or board placed at a convenient height on which to operate, a bowl of weak disinfecting solution, absorbent cotton, and two pieces of stout twine with weights attached.

An entirely satisfactory and simple operating table may be constructed of two pieces of dressed board about twenty inches long by twelve inches wide. These are hinged at one end, the hinges being set in about an inch from each side. Along the edges of one of the boards, finishing nails are driven at intervals of about two inches, allowing the nails to project about one inch. This board will form the top of the table. A block is used between the two boards so that the top may be elevated to any angle desired. This table is placed on the top of a box, barrel or other support, at a height to suit the operator; the bird is fastened down by means of the forementioned strings with wire hooks at one end to fasten round the wings and legs and weights on the other end to keep the bird stretched in position for operating.

Preparation of the Birds

The cockerels to be caponized should be confined for twenty-four to thirty-six hours before the operation in a clean pen without feed and for the last twelve hours without water. This starving period serves to empty the intestines and the operation can be performed more easily. It is a good plan to house the cockerels at night, keeping them confined for thirty-six hours and performing the operation the morning of the second day.

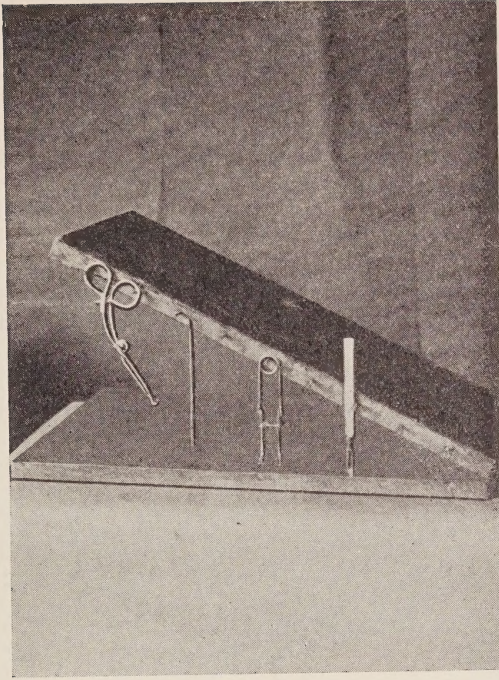


FIG. 2.—Caponizing instruments and table (side view).

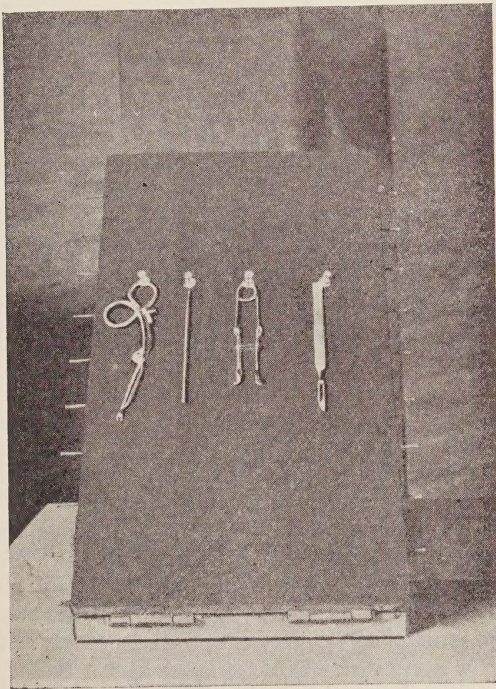


FIG. 3.—Caponizing instruments and table.

The Operation

The operating table or barrel should be placed out-of-doors in a sheltered position, but where the sun will strike directly on the table. The bird is stretched on the table on its side, its back away from the operator. The string fastening the wings is looped over a nail on the edge of the table, and another string fastening the legs is likewise looped over a nail on the opposite side of the table at a sufficient distance and angle that the weights, which are allowed to hang free on either side of the table, serve the double purpose of keeping the bird motionless and stretching the body as much as possible. The feathers on the side, in the vicinity of the last two ribs, are then plucked, the surrounding feathers being flattened down and the bare skin washed with a clean sponge or piece of absorbent cotton soaked in a weak disinfecting solution. The skin is drawn back towards the hip with the left hand and the space between the last

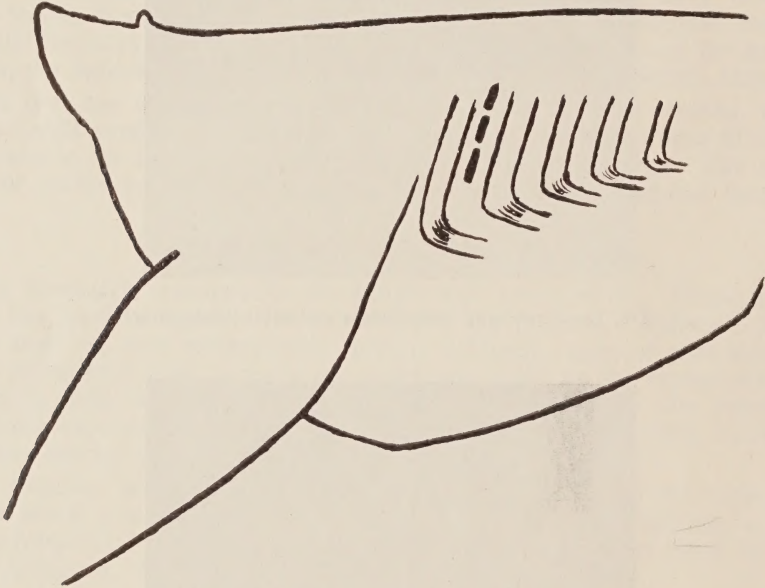


FIG. 4.—The dotted line shows the location of the incision between the last two ribs.

two ribs located with the finger. The knife is grasped in the right hand between the thumb and forefinger, allowing only about one-fourth inch of the blade to be exposed. Held in this manner, it is not possible to cut deep enough to injure the internal organs. The knife is placed between the ribs about one-half to three-quarters of an inch below the backbone. An incision about one inch long is made by drawing the knife toward the operator, being careful to follow the curve of the ribs. The position of the ribs and the proper location of the incision are shown in Fig. 4. The spreader is now inserted and the incision opened as far as possible without tearing the flesh. A thin transparent membrane, the mesentery, will be seen covering the intestine. This membrane is then torn by means of the hook, leaving a direct opening into the body cavity through which the upper testis can be observed lying just below the front end of the kidney. It will vary somewhat in size, shape and colour. Generally, it is considerably larger than a kernel of wheat, shaped like a bean, and yellowish-grey in colour. Often, partly or completely black testes will be found. This colour is due to the presence of pigment granules within the organ. This pigment is

not an indication of a disease condition. Such testes develop normally and become completely functional in mature males. At maturity, however, the pigment is either lost or is present in such small quantities as to be invisible to the naked eye. Occasionally very narrow, elongated testes will be found. The operator should learn to accurately distinguish the testes regardless of their shape or colour. The lower testis lies just underneath the upper one and may be seen by raising the upper organ. Experienced operators can remove both testes from one side; the beginner is well advised to make incisions on both sides, removing one testis through each incision.

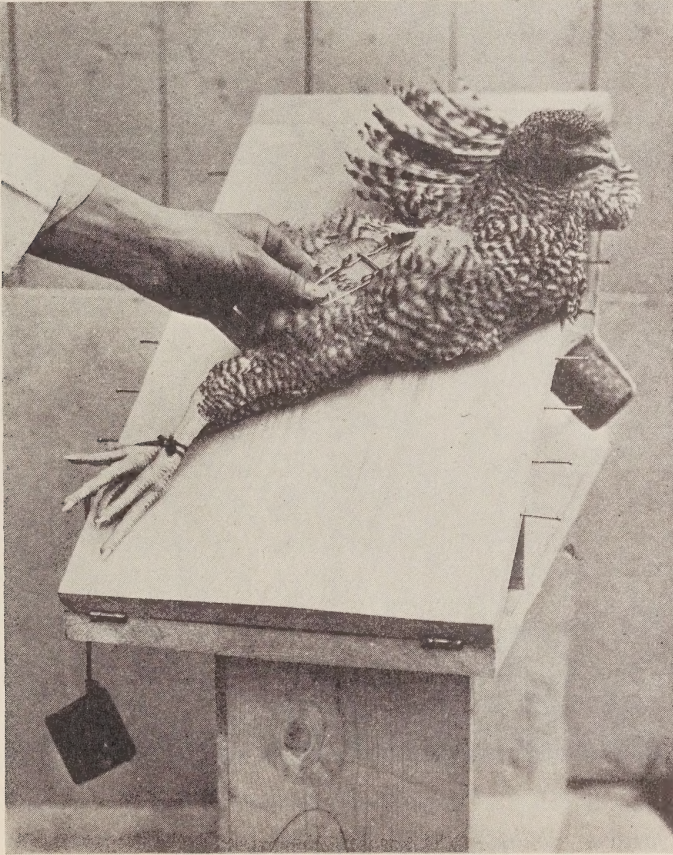


FIG. 5.—Spreader inserted.

The remover is now inserted in the opening and manipulated around the testis. If the remover is of the lock-forcep type, care should be taken to draw the testis slightly away from the back before locking the remover. This is an important point as it is quite easy to grasp the large vein which lies close to the back, between the two testes. If this vein is ruptured, the bird will immediately bleed to death. The remover with the enclosed testis is now retracted through the incision with a twisting motion, tearing the blood vessels and spermatic cords. The serous membranes surrounding the testes generally stretch and are retracted through the incision along with the testis. This is not the cord, as is commonly supposed, and may be severed with the knife, allowing the attached portion to drop back into the body cavity. The spreader is now

removed, the skin sliding back to its normal position, thus obliterating the direct opening into the body cavity. No stitches are necessary to close the wound. The bird is turned over, an incision made on the other side and the remaining testis removed in a similar manner. The operation is quite simple; even beginners rarely lose a large number of birds, and experienced operators attain considerable speed with comparatively little loss.

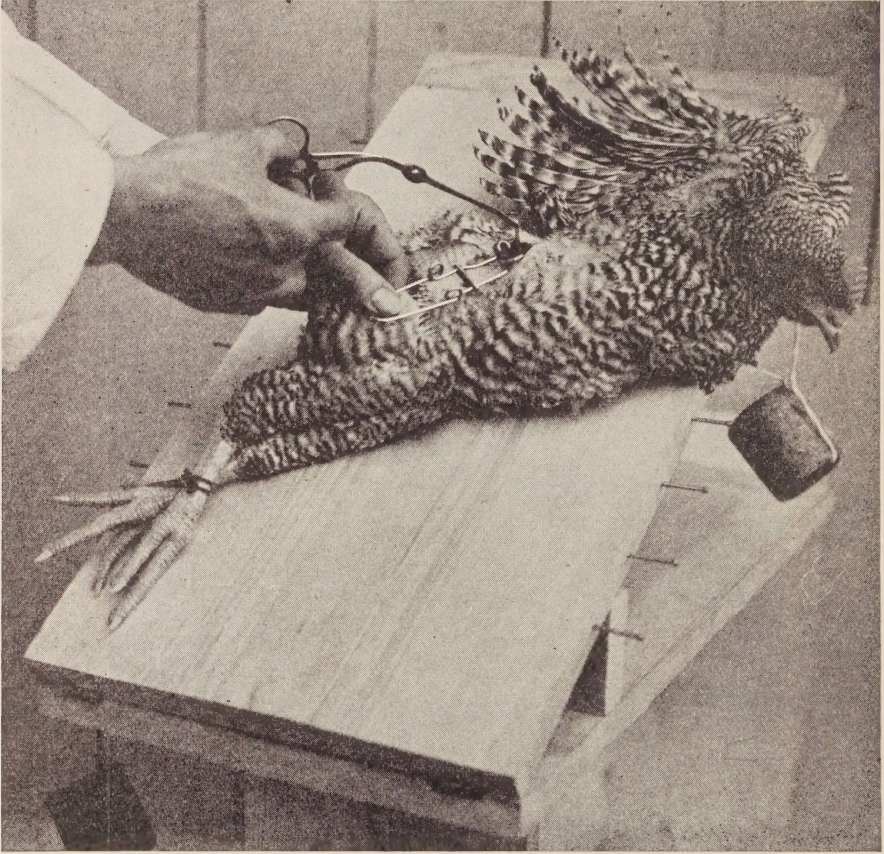


FIG. 6.—Testicle withdrawn.

Treatment After Operation

After the operation the birds should be placed under observation for a few days, preferably in a pen without roosts. They may be fed immediately, using soft feeds such as mash and liquids for a day or so.

Occasionally "air puffs" occur, due to the skin incision healing before the incision in the flesh between the ribs. This results in the air being forced from the air sacs within the body cavity through the opening into the space between the flesh and the skin, inflating it like a balloon. As soon as the incision through the flesh heals this trouble disappears. Should the "air puffs" reach such proportions as to interfere with the actions of the capon, the skin may be slit with a sharp instrument and the air allowed to escape.

The figures in the following table show the results of an experiment carried on at the Central Experimental Farm in the growth and finishing of Barred Plymouth Rocks, Leghorns, and their reciprocal cross-bred capons:—

**GROWING AND FINISHING EXPERIMENT WITH ROCK, LEGHORN AND CROSSBRED
CAPONS**

Date weighed.....	July 7	August 4	Septem- ber 1	Septem- ber 29	October 27	Novem- ber 24
Age in weeks.....	8½	12½	16½	20½	24½	28½
Average weight, in pounds.....						
Rocks.....	1.61	2.74	3.96	5.09	5.96	7.27
Crossbreds.....	1.70	2.78	3.92	5.08	5.67	6.79
Leghorns.....	1.51	2.45	3.40	4.19	4.65	5.39
(1) Gains per four weekly periods, in pounds.....						
Rocks.....		1.13	1.22	1.13	0.87	1.31
Crossbreds.....		1.08	1.14	1.16	0.59	1.12
Leghorns.....		0.95	0.95	0.79	0.46	0.74
Feed per bird per period in pounds.....						
Rocks.....		3.64	5.77	6.80	7.46	11.0
Crossbreds.....		3.49	6.18	7.26	7.11	11.17
Leghorns.....		2.91	5.65	6.34	5.45	9.52
(2) Total feed per bird from hatching, in pounds.....						
Rocks.....	5.18	8.82	14.58	21.39	28.85	39.85
Crossbreds.....	5.49	8.98	15.16	22.42	29.53	40.70
Leghorns.....	4.88	7.79	13.44	19.78	25.23	34.75
(3) Feed per pound gain per period, in pounds.....						
Rocks.....		3.22	4.69	6.02	5.58	8.40
Crossbreds.....		3.23	5.42	6.26	12.05	9.97
Leghorns.....		3.23	5.95	8.02	11.84	12.87
(4) Feed costs per pound gain by periods, in cents.....						
Rocks.....		4.8	7.0	9.0	12.9	16.8
Crossbreds.....		4.8	8.1	9.4	18.1	19.9
Leghorns.....		4.8	8.9	12.0	17.8	25.7
Feed cost per pound to various ages, in cents.						
Rocks.....		4.8	5.5	6.3	7.3	9.0
Crossbreds.....		4.8	5.8	6.6	7.8	9.8
Leghorns.....		4.8	5.9	7.1	8.1	10.6

- (1) During the period ending October 27, the birds went off condition slightly, probably due to a light attack of bronchitis.
- (2) It is assumed that the feed consumption per pound gain was the same from hatching to the beginning of the test as during the first period.
- (3) The amount of feed required per pound gain increases considerably with age, especially with Leghorns and Crossbreds. The birds, however, are putting on proportionately more flesh. Thus only about 50 per cent of a broiler is edible, while about 70 per cent of a finished capon is edible.
- (4) Feed for the growing periods cost 1½ cents per pound, and for the last, or fattening period, 2 cents per pound.

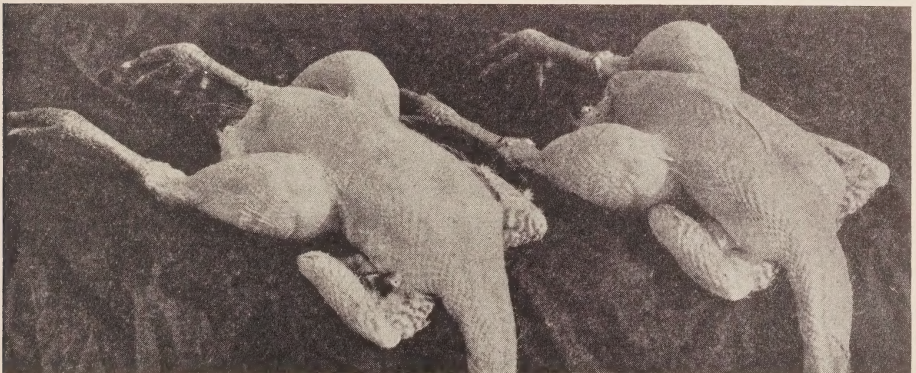


FIG. 7.—A pair of Barred Rock capons.



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